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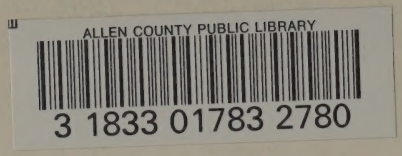

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J. B. Edmundson.

A SHORT SKETCH

Of the Early Settlement of

MAHASKA COUNTY,

IOWA,

By the Late

Wm. EDMUNDSON,

Who settled in Des Moines County, Iowa, in November 1836, and removed from there to Mahaska County in May 1843; where he lived until his death in September 1862.

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During the session of 1842 and 1843, Congress ratified the treaty, an event looked for with much interest. During the same winter, the legislature of Iowa, prospectively laid out the new purchase, as far West as the Red Rocks, into counties, by providing that certain townships and ranges should compose the several counties as specified by the act, Mahaska County being among the number, and the country being unsurveyed.

For several weeks previous to the 1st of May 1843, claim makers were collecting and camping on the public lands, preparatory to making claims as soon as the Indian title should expire The majority of them sat up all night on the last of April, and commenced marking and staking their claims as soon as the watch indicated the hour of midnight; for this reason it is impossible to say who was the first settler, as a great number made their claims simultaneously, remaining on them and bringing on their families in a short time afterwards.

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For several weeks previous to the 1st of May 1843, claim makers were collecting and camping on the public lands, preparatory to making claims as soon as the Indian title should expire. The majority of them sat up all night on the last of April, and commenced marking and staking their claims as soon as the watch indicated the hour of midnight; for this reason it is impossible to say who was the first settler, as a great number made their claims simultaneously, remaining on them and bringing on their families in a short time afterwards.

It is believed that A. S. Nichols erected and carried on the first blacksmith shop in the county at what was called Brim's Point, in the South Eastern part of the county.

None of us knew what county we were in till in September, 1843, when the country was laid out into townships, and by reference to the act of the legislature, we found that we were in Mahaska County, previous to which time we were not certain whether we (on the 6 mile prairie) were in Mahaska or Kishkekosh (now Monroe.) The first house erected in Mahaska County was built before the country was sold by the Indians; it was situated about one mile above Eddyville, which was then an Indian village (Hardfishes,) where J. P. Eddy had a trading house, Eddyville being on the N. W. quarter section of land in Wapello County. The house above referred to was built by a Mr. Macbeth, who was in some way connected with the trading post. It is not known who built the first house after settlement by the whites, a great many of the first settlers commencing their houses at the same time.

The first election held in Mahaska County was in October, 1843, at the house of Poultney Loughridge, who still (1861) lives on the same farm. Another election was held at the same time at the house of Wilson Stanley, on Lake Prairie, in what is now Marion County; they both being precincts attached to Washington County.

The first town laid out in Mahaska County, was on the Six Mile Prairie, on the farm now owned by a Mr. Dunn, of Indiana, and occupied by a Mr. Totten. It was laid out by Wm. Janes in June 1843, and called Harrisburg, but

the plat was probably never recorded. George W. Jones afterwards laid out a town on the same site and called it Auburn, and built a warehouse. There was never any further improvement.

. In the winter of 1843--4, a branch of the Fourier Association commenced operations on the farm then and now owned by Dr. E, A. Boyer, a short distance above where Rochester now stands. They made some improvements in the way of farming, but being without capital soon broke up. On the 5th day of February 1844, the legislature of Iowa passed an organizing act for the counties of Davis, Wapello, Keokuk and Mahaska. M. T. Williams was appointed Clerk, and Wm. Edmundson, Sheriff, to organize the County of Mahaska. Previous to this Wm. Edmundson had been appointed a Justice of the Peace by Govenor Chambers, under an act regulating unorganized counties. This was the first office ever held in the County; Wm. A. Delastmutt and Joseph Craig were appointed by Mr. Edmundson as his Constables.

The organizing election was held on the 1st day of April 1844, at which John White was elected Probate Judge; Wm. D. Canfield, Treasurer: Wm. Edmundson, Sheriff; Wm. A. Delastmutt, Assessor: Brittan Edwards, Coroner; A. S. Nichols, Wilson Stanley and Robert Curry, County Commissioners: Wm. Pilgrim, Recorder: David Stump, County Surveyor: and John W. Cunningham, County or Commissioners Clerk.

On the 1st Monday in May, 1844, the Commissioners for locating the county seat, Jesse Williams of Johnson County; Ebenezer Perkins of Washington County; and Thomas Hen-

derson of Keokuk County, met at the house of Matthew D. Springer, and after examining the premises, they on the 11 day of May, 1844, located the county seat at what was then called the Narrows, on the S. E. ¼ S. 13, T. 75, R. 16, when by a vote of those present it was named Mahaska.

The County Commissioners met on the 2nd Monday, the 13th day of May 1844, and proceeded to lay out the county seat. Before commencing the commissioner's books, Wm. D. Canfield proposed that the name of the town be changed, as he did not like the name of Mahaska. The proposition seemed to meet the approbation of the Commissioners and others present, when M. T. Williams proposed the name of Oskaloosa, (which was the name the locating commissioners had first intended, but which had been overruled by those present at the location) and after some discussion and debate, a vote was taken and the name of Oskaloosa adopted, which is still retained.

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The commissioners immediately proceeded to plat and lay out the town, which was surveyed by David Stump, the county Surveyor. It may here be proper to remark that the County had a pre-emption on one quarter section, under an act of congress, granting pre-emptions to new counties on any public lands, to be laid out as county seats.

The first house built within the boundaries of Oskaoosa, was built by Wm. D. Canfield in October 1843, who put it up as a claim house. It stood on what is now Perry Street between Harrison and South Sts., near the S. W. corner of the old town and nearly in front of the present residence of Richard Parker, Esq. It was afterwards moved and stood for many years on the north side of High street, between

Market and Washington Streets. It was taken down by the owner, Mr. David Fletcher, in June 1859, some of the timber being deposited in the Harper Library. There was another house put up before the organization of the county, or the location of the county seat, which was built by George W. and John W. Jones, and occupied as a grocery, the object being to draw the county seat to that point. This house stood near the corner of lots Nos. 2, 3, 6 and 7, in Block No. 20, a little South East of D. E. Budd's Livery Stable.

A tall pole was also erected on or near lot No. 1 in block No.27, not far from the South West corner of the public square, for the purpose of indicating the site of the future town.

As soon as the loction of the town was announced it was violently opposed by a large number of citizens, one party contending for the center of the county, and another for the Six Mile Prairie on the Des Moines River and they united in nominating a ticket for the General Election to be held in August. The county seat party however prevailed and harmony was restored. The opposition was so formidable at one time, that at the public sale of lots in June, very few purchasers were in attendance, so that the Commissioners after selling six lots and those at very reduced prices, stopped the sale; as a sample, lot No. 2 in block No. 20, on the North Side of the Square, sold for forty-five dollars, one-eighth in hand, and the balance on long credit.

The first house built after the location of the town was put up in June 1844, by P. L. Crossman, for a dwelling house, and was the one story building that still stands on lot No. 8, in block No. 21, on the North side of Main Street at the corner of Main and Washington Streets.

The first dry goods store was kept by M. L. Smith and Thomas Cameron, in a small log cabin on lot No. 1 in block No. 28 at the South East corner of the square, on the South side, on the lot where the two story building stands, lately occupied by F. S. Palmer, as a hardware store. This was in August 1844.

In September several buildings were put up, since which time the town has increased steadily. The first mill in Mahaska County was built during the year 1843, by Joseph and John K. Benedict on the Muchakinock about three miles above Eddyville. It was a saw-mill and had also a small pair of burrs for grinding corn, but has long since gone to ruin.

In October, 1844, a Mr. Lewis, a Methodist circuit rider, preached at the house of Isaac Harrel, on the six mile prairie. This is believed to have been the first sermon ever preached in the County. Mr. Lewis was a young man from Cincinnati, unused to frontier life, and left the circuit before his year was out.

The first term of the District Court was fixed by law to commence on the third Monday, the 15th day of July, 1844, Honorable Joseph Williams, Judge; M. T. Williams, Clerk, and Wm. Edmundson Sheriff. The Judge did not arrive until Wednesday the 17th when court was opened and Wm. Thompson, Esq., was appointed United States Attorney, *pro tem*, and Christian Slagle, Esq., District Attorney, *pro tem*, both courts being then presided over and held by the District Judge.

The grand jurors, who had been selected directly by the county Commissioners, in accordance with the laws then

existing, were James Argabright, George Argabright, John Rose, Aaron D. Bowers, Richard Parker, Adam Kline, Michael S. Morris, Osee Matthews, George W. Jones, Jefferson Chitwood, William Bean, James Hickenbotham, Wellington Nossaman, James Comstock, Andrew Storts, William Welch, Stephen B. Shelledy, Harmon Davis, John B. Stewart, Brantley Stafford, Jacob Crain, Alxander May, and John Vance.

The petit jurors were John Newell, Samuel Peters, John C. Baldwin, Thomas Brooks, Alfred Seevers, William Bovell, Robert Hammond, Thomas Fancher, Jacob Nordyke, James Seevers, Wm. D. Brown, James Ross, Alfred Hood, Solomon Barbee, Pleasant Parker, Greene T. Clarke, John P. Majors, Joseph H. Benedict, Thomas Williams, Isaac Baker, Wesley H. Freel, Thomas Wilson, Robert Curry Jr., and Benjamin Thomas.

The Court was held in a hewed log cabin which had been raised a short time previous, and covered with clapboards, a a loose plank floor had also been laid and a door cut out. A broad walnut plank, the only one in the place, was laid on the head of two barrels, behind this a low platform was raised by laying short boards on the logs which had been cut out of the door, and on this was placed a large rocking chair, which we happened to have at our command and upon this we seated the Judge; while the Clerk occupied one end of the aforesaid walnut plank and the lawers the other.

The jurors, litigants and spectators were seated on planks laid on blocks. I had forgotten to mention that most of the lawyers had chairs. This house was sit-

uated on lot No. 5 in block No. 20 on the north side of Main Street, and now forms the west room of the lower story of the two story yellow house now occupying the same ground, the large house having been built around the cabin. The grand jury room was a small cabin standing on lot No. 4 in block No. 13 on the east side of Market Street; it had been put up a few days before, as far as the square, and in the morning before court was called, the jurors and others present put on the roof and cut out a door, the sleepers having been put in at the time of raising the house; they with a few boards laid across furnished seats.

There was only one jury trial—James Hall, Appellee, *vs.* Jasper Koons, Appellant, forcible entry and detainer, an appealed case concerning a claim on the public lands. This case occupied most of the time during the term of court, which did not adjourn till Saturday evening: the grand jury also sat all week as the United States paid all expenses and there was no need of being in a hurry.

I have do distinct recollection where the petit jurors went when they retired to make up their verdict, but my impression is that they went out and sat on some lumber that happened to be piled out in the prairie, the sheriff keeping guard.

The lawyers present were W. W. Chapman, afterwards delegate in Congress, John W. Alley, Christian Slagle, George Atchison, Wm. Thompson, Henry Temple, now a well known attorney of Lewis, and perhaps others.

The first church building erected in Oskaloosa or in the county was the old Cumberland Presbyterian Church (a frame) still standing on the East side of Lafayette Street, between Harrison and South Streets, South East of the

Public Square. In the fall or winter of 1844, a Methodist class was organized in the six mile prairie neighborhood, a Mr. Chestnut being the class-leader. This is believed to have been the first church organization in the County.

The first steam engine brought into Oskaloosa or into the county, was attached to a saw mill erected by A. S. Nichols and Jonathan Atkins, in 1848-9, upon the same site where the woolen factory of Walker & Proudfit now stands, near North Street, between Washington and Jefferson. streets.

The first house built in Mahaska County, the one referred to heretofore, was built in October 1842 by a Mr. Macbeth, who was an Indian Trader, or who at least obtained a license as such, probably for the purpose of holding and improving a choice claim, before the expiration of the Indian title, a maneuver not very uncommon at that time. Macbeth having no family, employed John B Gray to occupy the house and trade for him. Mr. Gray moved in with his family sometime in November 1842, and remained till the Spring of 1843, when he moved onto the place where he still resides, in Monroe County. Mr. Gray's was certainly the first white family that ever lived in the county, though as before stated it is not known who was the first after the country came into possession of the United States Government. Mahaska County is said to have been called for an Indian Chief of that name.

The first school ever taught in Oskaloosa, probably the first in the county, was taught by Samuel W. Caldwell, in the winter of 1844-5, in the East room of A. G. Phillips dwelling house, at that time a farm house, situated partly on lots Nos. 2 and 3 in block No. 3 Houtz's addition and partly on the crossing of the two alleys dividing said block. The school room was on lot

No.2 and on the alley that runs East and West through the block. The house was a double log cabin. The East or school room has been moved onto lot No. 1 in the same block and is now used as a stable. Mr. Caldwell went to Oregon in 1845 where he gained some notoriety by publishing a spelling-book.

The first practicing physician in the county was Dr. E. A. Boyer, who settled in the Spring of 1843, on the farm where he still resides and near where the town of Rochester now stands. Dr. S. D. Porter was the first physician in Oskaloosa, where he settled in June 1843. Dr. Wm. Wetherford came soon after. Henry Temple was the first lawyer in Oskaloosa or in the county, having first come come to the Six Mile Prairie in May 1843.

The oldest trees in Oskaloosa are two black locusts, on the lot and in the yard around Matthew Edmundson's old house on out lot No. 11. The seed were planted by Wm. D. Canfield, near the present site of Roop's Mill in 1845, and the trees were transplanted to where they now stand in the Spring of 1847.

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